

BACKGROUND ON THE ISSUE

Lack of access to mental health services has, in part, contributed to an increase in the suicide rate in the United States, which is now the tenth leading cause of death in the country. In 2017, 47,173 Americans died by suicide. Suicide of a loved one often results in “suicide contagion” – where surviving family members struggling to cope with loss are at increased risk of attempting suicide. Studies show that family members’ risk of attempting suicide increases by 65%.

There is an immediate need to improve access to mental health services for loss survivors. Studies show that 28 million residents are uninsured and that 60% of adults and 50% of children in need of mental health services were unable to receive such services in the previous calendar year.

SUMMARY OF THE BILL

The Greater Mental Health Access Act establishes a special enrollment period for family members of an individual who has died by suicide, and it creates a competitive grant program through which services and support are provided to family members and friends.

This bill treats the death of a family member by suicide as a “qualifying life event,” through which surviving family members may enroll in or change their health insurance to cover mental health services. Such enrollment or change can occur regardless of whether the “qualifying life event” occurred during the open enrollment period or not.

This legislation also creates a competitive grant program within the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act to be made available to non-profits, religious organizations, clinics, medical providers and hospitals to arrange and/or provide outpatient mental health services for families and friends impacted by suicide or attempted suicide of a loved one.

With the Greater Mental Health Access Act, more surviving family members and friends will get treatment they need and fewer episodes of suicide contagion will occur.

ENDORSED BY



A M E R I C A N
ASSOCIATION OF SUICIDOLOGY